

League of Women Voters of the Greater Capital Area

February 2017

League of Women Voters of the US - 1920-2017 Happy Birthday.....97 years and growing stronger

The League of Women Voters was chartered on February 14, 1920, just six months before the 19th amendment to the Constitution was ratified, giving women the right to vote after a 72 year struggle. The League was designed to help 20 million women carry out their new responsibilities as voters, encouraging them to use their new power to participate in shaping public policy. As we look back over those 97 years, has there ever been a more important time for the League?

As I have pondered and worried about the uncertainty our country is facing, a wise woman said to me, "I want you to know that I have decided not to feel disheartened by the present situation. Rather, I am viewing it as a timely inspiration to revisit all the reasons that our democracy is so special and valuable and to use those reasons as the foundation for focused action. No way am I going quietly into 'that dark night'."

A basic principle of the League has always been to encourage citizens to become engaged in their government and that's an amazing focus right now in our country. So, as League members, do all you can to get others involved. This is the year to communicate with your legislators and hold them accountable as we strive to make democracy work for everyone.

At our February meeting, we'll celebrate the anniversary of the League with a birthday cake and a re-commitment for all of us to follow the words of my wise friend.

Charter Schools in New Hampshire The School Bells are Ringing

**Speaker: June Frazer
Wednesday, February 15
10-12**



Baker Library, South Street, Bow

With a new Commissioner of Education under consideration and a new 2-year budget to be developed, the spotlight is on education in New Hampshire. Are public schools providing the education our children need for the 21st century? Is the state providing a fair share of funding for public schools? Should parents have a voucher to send their children to the school of their choice? Are charter schools filling an educational need in our state?

June Frazer, longtime League member who served on the Education Committee of the NH House of Representatives for all terms she served on the NH General Court, will share with us the role of charter schools in New Hampshire. In 2003, the legislature approved a pilot program to allow the State Board of Education to authorize up to 20 public charter schools within 10 years. New Hampshire received a total of 17.9 million in two grants from the federal government to establish high-quality public charter schools. In 2016, NH was not selected to receive additional start-up money from the federal government and thus, there is no start-up funding available. As of now, there are 26 charter schools in NH, enrolling approximately 3,000 students. The 26 schools receive a total of 20.3 million from the state budget.

Charter schools are public schools, tuition-free, options for parents and students seeking an alternative to traditional public schools. They are free from many of the rules and regulations that apply to local school districts.

There are 9 bills in the legislature this term dealing with charter schools. June will share with us so much more information about the status of charter schools in NH. Are they living up to their charters and mission? Are they sustainable? What's the impact on the public schools in their district?



Looking Ahead to March

Day at the Legislature
Date to be determined - Early March

League members from all over the state will gather for a briefing on committees and bills for that day, attend hearings of their choice, enjoy lunch together and discuss topics of League concern for this session. More details will be sent out soon.



Fake News, Tweets, and Facts in Our Democracy

Sunday, March 26

4-5:30

Hopkinton Library

A distinguished panel including John Greabe, a UNH professor of constitutional law and related subjects, John Gfoerer, documentary producer and owner of Accompany, a video production company and Ralph Jimenez, editorial writer for the Concord Monitor and thee recipient of the 2012 Civil Union Bill of Rights Award, will join Liz Tentarelli as moderator.

Questions they'll discuss will include -

- What is "news"? in the broadest, highest sense?
- How does fake news impact the very concept of a democracy?
- How does the rapidity and "hackability" of social media change the way we view news?
- Are tweets news? Are they newsworthy? Who decides?
- What is the "wrong news"? (e.g. flashing things versus substantive issues?)
- What is the job of the print and broadcast media in providing more complete information about critical issues?

This timely, challenging presentation has been planned by Janet Ward and is co-sponsored by the Hopkinton Library and the Greater Capital Area League of Women Voters. Make sure you get this on your calendar - it's a program not to be missed.

Action Alert



Public Hearing
Criminal Justice Committee
Tuesday, February 7 at 2:00
Legislative Office Building, Room 204
HB 351



This bill amends the capital murder statute to include knowingly causing the death of a person who is less than 18 years of age. The New Hampshire Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty will testify at this hearing and requests that people show up to signify their opposition - you do not need to speak, just be there.

HB351

Last year, NH pro-death penalty groups tried to expand executions to those guilty of acts of terrorism. With help from our members, the New Hampshire Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty was able to defeat the bill.

HB351 is a solution in search of a problem.

Child murders are very low in New Hampshire and our state has a good record of appropriately prosecuting them. In the most recent case of a child death last year in NH, the mother was clearly mentally and emotionally unequipped to deal with the demands of a special needs child. Rather than executing such individuals, we should provide better and more timely social and mental health services to parents in distress.

HB351 would be extremely expensive.

The Department of Justice has stated that "death penalty cases are more expensive to investigate and litigate than non-death penalty homicide cases." The state of New Hampshire has already spent more than \$5 million over the last 10 years for the prosecution, defense and other non-counsel services of a single death penalty case. (Michael Addison).

HB351 increases the likelihood of wrongful convictions and the execution of innocent parents.

Parents and others are often convicted of murdering children when in fact no crime has occurred at all. In these heartbreaking cases, parents who tragically lost their children to sickness or accident are then wrongfully convicted and to sentence them to death based on faulty evidence and/or prosecutorial misconduct is wrong.

Any time a child dies it is highly emotional. Child deaths bring great public and political pressure to attribute blame and solve the "crime", and this is precisely when the criminal justice system has the most chance of getting it wrong. This is why child murder cases are often riddled with conclusions based on junk science, suggestive interrogation leading to false witness testimony, wrongful witness identification and prosecutorial misconduct.

The last woman executed in New Hampshire was wrongfully executed for her child's death.

Ruth Blay was executed in New Hampshire in 1769. It was later determined that the baby was stillborn and a pardon for Ruth arrived moments after she was hung.

(Information on this bill provided by the NH Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty). The League is a member of this coalition and supports the complete elimination of the death penalty in New Hampshire.

Have you checked the League website lately? It's a great source of information and our president, Liz Tentarelli, does an amazing job of keeping it up to date. Check it out today.

lwvnh.org